The Dalton Laboratory Plan in a School for the Blind

By Helen Parkhurst, J.M. Ritchie

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Educational Publications
Bureau of Research and Education
American Foundation for the Blind, Inc.

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No. 1

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By Miss Kathryn E. Maxfield,
American Foundation for the Blind, Inc.
New York, N. Y.

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By Miss Helen Parkhurst,
Educational Director, The Dalton Schools, Inc.,
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III. DALTON IN A SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND.
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FORWORD.

By
KATHRYN E. MAXFIELD

During the last few years many attempts have been made to improve upon the traditional modes of instruction which have been the cause of so much dissatisfaction, both within and without the teaching profession. Before class instruction came into vogue, individual instruction meant solitary cramming of the mind with "book learning." Class instruction has often meant collective cramming of the same sort. Once again the value of individual instruction is being recognized—but it is individual instruction with a difference. Some educators feel that class instruction should be eliminated entirely, but others think that a combination of the two is necessary to train young people for the varied relationships of adult life. The school of today must train children *how to think*, how to balance thought with action, how to temper desire with thought. In this respect the duty of the school toward the handicapped child is particularly urgent. After he leaves school, the success of the blind youth is likely to depend more upon ability to "fit in" with his seeing comrades and upon his ability so to organize his life as to make each effort count to the full, than upon the amount of Latin he may know or on the number of anthems he can play from memory.

Probably the most widely accepted of the recently developed agencies for teaching is that known as the Dalton Laboratory Plan. Originating in America, this Plan has been adopted by more than 500 schools in England, by more than 1,450 schools in Japan, by 1,250 schools in China, and by 50 schools in India. It has been adopted as the official method for education in Holland and in Moscow. There are also Dalton Plan schools in Germany, Austria, Poland, Norway and Spain. In the United States there are at least 200 such schools. In the past six years books explaining the use of the Dalton Laboratory Plan have been translated into at least 12 languages.

In the accompanying article Miss Helen Parkhurst, the originator of the Dalton Laboratory Plan, states the fundamental principles of the Plan as follows:

"First, Freedom; Second, Co-operation and Interaction of Group Life, or Community Living; and Third, the Proportioning of Effort to Attainment, or Budgeting of Time." Of what importance are each of these principles to superintendents of schools for the blind?

Institutional schools are criticised for their tendency so to circumscribe the individual as to disqualify him for meeting life as an independent adult. The multiplicity of rules, the close regulation of all his waking hours, and the unbroken routine of institution life give the individual little opportunity to make decisions of his own. There is probably not a superintendent in the country who does not recognize the force of this criticism, and who is not pondering over the problem as it exists in his own school.

The Dalton Plan necessitates that the pupil make his own decisons throughout each school day, not only deciding what work he shall do at a given time, but also how he can best relate his needs to the needs of his fellows. He is free to advance as rapidly as he is able, and he is free to suffer if laziness or lack of planning retards him. He is free to make his own decisions and, like the adult, he is free to pay the price if his decisions are inadequate.

The second principle—"Community Living"—is highly important to the future life of the blind child. Who has not wondered what could be done with the blind girl whose hurt vanity breaks up an athletic contest; or with the boy whose complete inertia makes his presence in a school room destructive to class unity. Under the Dalton Plan, from the time they enter the fourth grade, children are obliged to work with others as they will be required to do in adult life.

The third principle emphasized by the Dalton Plan is "Time-Budgeting." Because of the character training involved in the exercise of this principle, it is probably the most distinctive feature of the Plan. It takes careful planning to make out a time-budget for a week's work. It takes self-control and singleness of purpose to follow that time-budget or to change it wisely.

There seem to be many possibilities in the Dalton Plan as a medium of instruction in schools for the blind. Miss Parkhurst has revised for our use a short article, which she published in the Twenty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education. Superintendents who desire more detailed information on the application of the Dalton Plan are referred to the bibliography below.

In at least one school for the blind, the Dalton Laboratory Plan is now in successful operation. Since it has been in use for a considerable length of time, we have asked the superintendent to discuss its practicability in residential schools for the blind, in the light of his experience. Mr. Ritchie's article is frank and to the point. We are glad to present this stimulating, practical discussion of the Dalton Laboratory Plan and its application to a school for the blind.

Education on the Dalton Plan, by Helen Parkhurst. E. P. Dutton & Company, 681 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.

Twenty-fourth Yearbook, National Society for the Study of Education, Part II, p. 272. An Effort at Appraisal, by Dr. William H. Kilpatrick, containing a critque of the Dalton Laboratory Plan.

The Dalton Laboratory Plan, by Evelyn Dewey. E. P. Dutton Company.

THE DALTON LABORATORY PLAN*

By

HELEN PARKHURST

The Dalton Laboratory Plan is a sociological, rather than a curricular experiment. It aims to socialize the school and keep its life from becoming mechanical. It emphasizes a change in the conditions of the *life of the school* instead of concentrating upon the curriculum as do most other educational experiments. The Dalton Plan should be considered a *vehicle for* the curriculum. With it one may use a formal or an informal curriculum. As curriculum is to be thought of as a pupil's 'mental food,' it is understood that one of the determining factors of a pupil's development will be whether or not the curriculum transported by this 'vehicle' satisfies his needs.

To give an understanding of the Dalton Plan, it is necessary to state its pholosophy and psychology. Briefly, this is to enumerate its principles. It may be said that in connection with the Dalton Plan these principles are not a result of tardy or recent rationalizing about the plan itself; instead, these principles were laid down at the inception of the plan, and have been carefully followed, and proclaimed as the contribution of the laboratory plan (now Dalton Laboratory Plan) since 1911.

There are but three fundamental principles, viz.—*First, Freedom; Second, Co-operation and Interaction of Group Life, or Community Living;* and *Third, The Proportioning of Effort to Attainment, or Budgeting Time.* Principle One is common to many education experiments as a prerequisite and it has had many advocates. By "freedom," I mean freedom to work without interruptions in order to pursue an interest and in order to develop concentration. As applied to an individual, it is understood to mean that he is to be freed from those habits or conditions which enslave his life or impede his complete development. Freedom must be understood as being a means to all of his activities and pursuits.

In the use of Principles Two and Three, the laboratory plan, now known generally as the "Dalton Plan," antedates other educational experiments. These two principles are therefore to be considered as the plan's contribution to educational procedure.

Theoretically, there is "nothing new under the sun;" and practically, the only new thing in the Dalton Plan is its departure from old school practices and the new procedure instituted to introduce the second and third principles into the school.

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It may be well to note how the second principle, *i. e.*, the interaction of group life or community living, is brought about. Instead of the usual grade rooms and grade teachers, we have subject laboratories and specialists; instead of confining the pupils of a single grade to one room, the pupils of four or five grades have access to at least as many laboratories and are permitted to go from subject laboratory to subject laboratory, *mingling and living*, within the school, while engaged in school pursuits, just as the community outside of school lives and works. It is impossible for an individual pupil, an individual teacher, or an individual class under the Dalton Plan to live independently of others. Here we put in operation Dewey's theory that "A democratic education is not merely to make an individual an intelligent participant in the life of his immediate group, but it is also necessary to bring the various groups into *constant interaction* and *such constant* interaction that *no individual, no economic group, could* presume to *live independently of others.*"

Every school has a stated amount of time in which to do a given amount of work, and so, in accordance with the third principle (proportion of effort to attainment, or budgeting of time) we map out the work for each class in the form of a job and permit individual pupils to budget the time allotted for a month (laboratory time) according to the demands of their individual needs and difficulties.

Under these principles, the Dalton Plan creates new conditions of school life in which the pupils, to enjoy them, involuntarily function as individual members of a social community. A pupil forms the same kind of relationships in his school life that he will afterwards meet in his business or professional life.

Those who desire to be intelligent about the Dalton Plan must not confuse it with curriculum. It is a *vehicle* by which a curriculum can be transported. Although there appears to be a wide margin between the advocates of individual instruction and the advocates of the project method (both groups are conducting worthy experiments in curriculum) neither group will find the Dalton Plan anything but a helpful agent for administering and furthering its ideals or program of work. Consistently, the Dalton Plan has been kept out of the field of curricular debate and confined to experiments in "learning" as based on *the laws of learning*. Investigation shows that excellent results have been achieved in schools that have used the Dalton Plan as a vehicle for the curriculum as administered according to the program based upon methods of individual instruction; and again, in other schools, projects have become the spontaneous expression of the *real living* of children who, under the conditions of the Dalton Plan, arranged their own course, checked their own results, and budgeted their own time with great satisfaction and profit.

The "individual instructionists" find it necessary to supplement their program by adding dramatics, games, etc., in order to safeguard their program from becoming too mechanical; the enthusiasts of the project find their ideal program blocked because at each step they are confronted by the out-of-date school machinery of the average school, and because teachers, while recognizing the value of the new, are handicapped for lack of a school procedure which will permit or encourage any new attempts.

The Dalton Plan does not aim to reconcile these two groups, the "individual instructionists" and "projectionists," because to us they seem sincerely headed in different directions. The author feels personally that individual instruction is apt to degenerate into mere "technic" and that the conditions of the average school are not sufficiently free to permit of children's ideas becoming real projects. What the Dalton Plan does aim to do, is to reorganize the *life of the school* and furnish it with a procedure which will be advantageous to either group; permit pupils to enjoy true community life, to build up from day to day the sort of habits which one needs in life outside of school, and to put the child in command of his own resources so that he becomes master instead of servant. Under the Dalton Plan, a pupil can truly become an 'efficiency expert' of his own affairs. The procedure of the Dalton Plan can be used regardless of the curriculum adhered to; it is not a back-door method of forcing 'interesting learning' but a way of permitting the learner to learn. It will, however, bring about a marked change in his curricular content.

To institute the Dalton Plan, it is not necessary to banish our system of school grades; there is every opportunity for spontaneous work; there is opportunity for drill at the very moment when it is necessary, either from the teacher's point of view or that of the pupil; pupils are permitted to progress at their own rate of speed in various subjects unhampered within the circumference of the job; and there is true opportunity for all-round *individual development.*

A great Russian actor who lives for the theatre, after visiting a Dalton school a second time, said: "Every laboratory is a theatre and creative energy is continuously freed. This beautiful drama being enacted before our eyes is *life* at its very best."

Under the Dalton Plan, the pupil is given his work in the shape of a series of related jobs. The work of any job is very carefully outlined, sometimes by the teachers, often by the pupils, depending upon the kind of school. Each job corresponds to what can easily be done within a school month of 20 days. The number of jobs outlined for a school year depends upon the number of months comprising the academic year of the school using the plan. Thus, the number varies from eight to ten jobs.

The Dalton Plan is applicable to any part of the school above, and beginning with, the fourth grade. The fourth grade is taken as a starting point because pupils of that age and of that stage supposedly have the tool subjects sufficiently well in hand to enable them to work independently and easily.

A single job may be the working out of a single idea or each job may be made up of a collection of correlated assignments of work. In a school where, say, five subjects compose the curriculum, if the work is to be arranged in jobs, work would be outlined in advance to cover a 20-day period, and work sheets or procedure sheets (assignments) would be made out to show a pupil how to attack each subject. Individual copies of these work sheets (assignments) would be given to each pupil.

We speak of a "job" as comprising a certain number of "units" of work. A unit of work, in quantity, approximates, or corresponds to, what would usually be assigned for a daily recitation in a subject. Twenty units of work would be outlined for each subject taught. If a grade's curriculum had *five subjects,* then a *job* would comprise 20×5 units, or 100 units of work. A unit of work, *from the pupil's point of view,* is not a set amount to be done in a certain stated amount of time, nor does a unit of history, for instance, equal a unit of music or art. Pupils take as much time as they need out of the entire amount at their disposal, to do any given 20 units of work of an assignment.

Teachers have to be careful not to outline more work for a job than pupils can accomplish in the combined laboratory periods of any given 20-day period, but very slow pupils may take more than 20 days if necessary. To safeguard setting too much work, I suggest a teacher's "time-set," as a gauge.

A morning in a Daltonized school is divided into two short periods and one very long period, viz.: first, an organization period lasting from 15 to 30 minutes; second, a laboratory period from two to three hours, and preferably at the close of the morning, a conference period lasting 30 or 40 minutes.

The Dalton Plan does not prescribe any set amount of time for "laboratory time," but it is suggested that, whenever possible, three-fourths of the morning time be made available for this purpose.

Let us say that a school sets aside three hours as laboratory time; then, in a school month of 20 days, a pupil's laboratory time would approximate 20×3 hours, or 60 hours. Each pupil, therefore, would have at his disposal 60 hours in which to do his 100 units of work. This 60 hours is budgeted by each pupil to serve his individual needs, and *definite instruction is given as to how to budget time.* If a pupil does the entire job (100 units) in less than 60 hours, he immediately proceeds with the next job. There is no waiting for slower pupils, nor are slow pupils rushed along at an accelerated rate or carried by the momentum of the class, producing inaccurate, slovenly work; nor would a slow pupil have to finish in 20 days. *He may have more time whenever necessary;* nor is a 20-day period supposed to coincide with a series of school or calendar months. A pupil counts "one" as his first work day, and so marks his work graph. "Two" is his second day, etc. Absent days are not counted. We go from 1 to 20, because work is set on a 20-day basis.

If a school desired to devote to English the equivalent of 40 minutes a day as a minimum, then the English teacher, in mapping out his work, would guard against outlining more for 20 days (20 units) than could be done by a slow pupil in 20×40 minutes, or 800 minutes. We go further, for we make weekly divisions. These weekly divisions do not block a pupil's interest or retard his progress; they are psychological divisions rather than actual stop signals; they merely indicate to the pupil that a fourth of any subject of the job is completed and put behind him. In the particular subject mentioned, English, the teacher's "time-set" for a week would be 5×40, or 200 minutes.

A pupil may do all of his work, subject by subject, one subject at a time, or a little of one and much of another. He is free to plan his own time and discover his own better methods of work. The reason for a "time-set" should be made clear. It is to make sure that all of a job set for 60 hours can be done, by a slow pupil, in that time. I here give a "time-set" for a school with a curriculum comprising five subjects and 60 hours laboratory time.

TIME-SET

Subjects	A Unit Basis 1 day's Work	A Week's Work 5-unit Basis	A Month's Work 20-unit Basis
English	40	200	800
History*	45	225	900
Geography*	45	225	900
Mathematics	30	150	600
Science or Nature Study	20	100	400
A month's job of 5 assignments	180 min., or 3 hrs. daily	900 min., or 15 hrs. a week's basis	3600 min., or 60 hrs.

*Or the Social Sciences.

My personal opinion is that teachers *should not put the "time-set" in the hands of pupils,* for fear that doing so will rob the third principle of the Dalton Plan (budgeting of time) of its function. As a pupil learns to budget his time to better advantage, a job can often be done in less than

60 hours, and a new job be undertaken immediately. This means that a bright pupil will save time on his whole job. Thus, in a year, he can do more than the regular work mapped out for a grade. A pupil might, for instance, be able to do a particular week's work in mathematics in 70 minutes, and, as compared to the time-set, have 80 minutes additional for some difficult subject, like history. He then would be permitted 125 minutes for history if he desired; whereas otherwise he would have been permitted only 45. Time saved on one subject may be used for another subject or used in getting ahead more quickly.

Laboratories, or subject work-shops, are established for each subject, but in the separate laboratories pupils spend only as much time as is needed to accomplish an assignment of work. Each pupil has a job card to measure his progress; he can see at a glance just where he stands on the whole job. A special pupil time-chart is provided for older pupils so that they can record how they are using their time as individuals.

When the Dalton Plan is applied to an entire school, the high-school subject laboratories are considered as one unit, and the elementary school as another unit. The plan of work, and the organization of the school with its new procedure, in reality extends the province of the junior high school so as to include the fourth grade.

When any division of the school has more than 250 pupils—say, for instance, that the elementary school (IV-VIII) has 1250 pupils—we establish five sets of laboratories for each subject.

To insure community living and mingling, we group pupils according to a cross-section division plan, as is indicated in the accompanying scheme for 1250 pupils.

LABORATORY DISTRIBUTION FOR 1250 PUPILS

Grade	“A” Laboratories	“B” Laboratories	“C” Laboratories	“D” Laboratories	“E” Laboratories
4th	50 Pupils	50 Pupils	50 Pupils	50 Pupils	50 Pupils
5th	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “
6th	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “
7th	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “
8th	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “	50 “
Total	250 Pupils in “Group “A”	250 Pupils in Group “B”	250 Pupils in Group “C”	250 Pupils in Group “D”	250 Pupils in Group “E”

This table indicates that the 1250 elementary pupils, which would ordinarily constitute five 4th grades, five 5th grades, five 6th grades, five 7th grades, and five 8th grades, or 25 grades with 25 teachers, would, under the Dalton Plan, be reclassified so that in each cross-section unit of 250, we should keep for each community group, one 4th grade, one 5th grade, one 6th grade, one 7th grade, and one 8th grade (five grades and five teachers). This permits the interplay or interaction of older with younger pupils. In order to have pupils going consistently to the same laboratories, we have all of the "A" Group go to "A" Laboratories, "B" Group to "B" Laboratories, etc. There would be five laboratories for each group. In the "A" Group there would be, for instance, an *A* Science or Nature Laboratory, an *A* Mathematics Laboratory, an *A* English Laboratory and either two *A* Social Science Laboratories or an *A* History Laboratory and an *A* Geography Laboratory. Just as five grades in the usual grade school need five teachers, the Dalton Plan would use five teachers for the five laboratories in each unit.

We consider 250 pupils the maximum for any division. Any smaller number is treated in the same fashion. If, for instance, 250 pupils was the enrollment of the elementary school, there would be five laboratories and five teachers; if 500, there would be 10 with 10 teachers, etc. In my own school, the "Children's University," because we have put art and dramatics on the same basis as other subjects, we have nine laboratories, *i. e.,* laboratories for art, music, a theatre, English, science, French, and two for social science (history and geography combined), as well as a library. This, of course, gives a very broad and cultural curriculum.

The pupils remain in grades and have their grade jobs; they go from laboratory to laboratory according to their interests and needs, during the laboratory time and without asking permission; and they are free to choose and plan within the limits of the job. These jobs depend upon a child's capacity and rank. There is but one restriction to a pupil's freedom. If he does the 20 units of history required by his job, he cannot go on in the subject, history, until he has completed his 20 units of geography, his 20 units of mathematics, etc.—or, in other words, until all of "Job I" is completed. Then he may proceed with Job II, unhandicapped. This is very important, because an uninstructed pupil cannot wisely organize and budget time. All of a single grade get together with an "Organization Advisor," the same one, at the same time each morning. Pupils report their progress, make their individual time tables for the day, and study the problem of how to reconcile any shortages in their unit scores. A pupil carrying five subjects, has a "work norm" of five units, and should do five units each day. If a pupil fails to get this norm, perhaps when he is doing his most difficult subjects, he is taught to swing into an easier subject next day so that he can do more. This helps him to get ahead or to break even and thus reconcile any shortage.

During laboratory time, pupils are encouraged to work together in grade groups according to need or through the medium of the assignment, where it is requested that work be done by groups rather than individuals. If, for instance, a fourth-grade pupil entered a laboratory, while there, unless he was confronted with a special piece of work which could only be done by working alone, he must work in that part of the room set aside for his grade. This grouping encourages discussion and debate, and gives a line of direction to conversation which might be promiscuous if the pupils had nothing in common. Before pupils leave a laboratory, they record their progress on their individual job graphs, also on the instructor's graph, which is to be considered a class progress graph. The class progress graphs show an instructor where each individual of a class is in his work at any time.

The last half-hour of the morning (forty minutes in some schools) is designated as "conference time." The pupils who met at "organization time" now meet again for a conference—that is, they confer together over a specified part of the job, according to a posted conference schedule. Monday a grade may meet in geography, Tuesday in history, Wednesday in English, Thursday in science, and Friday in mathematics. During this time, debates, reviews, reports, etc., are given—anything which relates to the subject for which the pupils are called in conference.

These conferences, coming once a week as they do, are not considered as a time for presenting new material. They are too infrequent for that purpose. Presentations of new material are scheduled on a "Presentation Bulletin Board," and are at the call of the teachers, who schedule special calls or classes in accordance with the progress and need of individuals or groups. These appointments are classified and posted under grade headings. They are posted in the morning before the pupils arrive, so that, upon arrival, each pupil makes a daily memorandum of the engagements he is to have with his instructors. He takes these interruptions into account at organization time when planning his day. These interruptions are called *special* conferences and children who have done the same amount of work are gathered in "instruction groups" for drill, for review or for the presentation of new subject matter. In this way, a teacher may call together several individuals, or an entire class, as often as necessary, as determined by the need of a subject. Here the only restriction is that there shall be no more than two "special presentation conferences" scheduled for any single grade in the course of a morning, and that the first notice posted shall have preference. This may make it necessary for a second instructor to change the hour of his appointment. Whenever an entire class is called, a sign is put on the laboratory door saying: "This laboratory is closed." All others than the class called are expected to "stay out." This is to avoid interruptions. When small groups are called, the laboratory remains "open" to capacity. To avoid crowding, a capacity limit is set for each laboratory, *i. e.,* a number indicating capacity is posted on the door. If an instructor desires to take some grade on an excursion to a museum or industrial plant, lasting an entire morning, a notice is posted for that grade, telling the time, the meeting place, etc. The instructor puts up the "Closed Laboratory" sign and is off with the pupils.

The plan combines class work, spontaneous group work, and individual work, but above all it is designed to give pupils a training in handling a job, to teach a pupil to manage time and to plan his work; and at each step of the way take himself and his needs into account in order to assure *individual development* at each point.

Dr. Karl F. Muenzinger of Colorado University, says:

> "If, in teaching according to the Dalton Plan, there are to be no more class periods; if the student may spend as much time in the geography laboratory as he pleases before he decides for himself to go to the science laboratory; if he can start this morning with history and to-morrow with French as his interest directs him—where will such unheard of independence get him to? Does not such a plan make study a prey of the variable moods and whims of the youth who should be guided wisely and firmly? This danger is more apparent than real since the Dalton Plan matches such a freedom with a greater definiteness as regards the subject matter than can be found in the usual school curriculum. The 'units' and 'job' of the Dalton Plan remind one very strongly of the task system of scientific management. Just as the industrial engineer has to study and analyze the work and the worker, and construct such tasks as will make 'a good day's work,' so the teacher under the new plan has to study and analyze the subject and student, and prepare 'units,' a required number of which will make a week's or a month's work.
>
> "The definiteness of such a task, or unit, enables the student to envisage his problem, and to know how fast he is progressing in his work. Unlike the worker under scientific management, however, he is not told to do this particular job and no other, but he is allowed to choose which job he may tackle this morning and to solve as much or as little of it as he wants, only—all the jobs for the month must be completed before he can start next month's work. When he starts to work on a chosen subject he has a definite 'set' towards his problem, the importance of which for the learning process cannot be overestimated, and this attitude has been brought about under the best possible conditions. It is not the result of the ringing of a bell and a change of classrooms (how could we ever think this would turn the trick?), but it is the result of the student's own choice, determined by his desires and interests, on the one hand, and his needs as he himself sees them, on the other hand.
>
> "The dangers that might be perceived in such a system of definite tasks (units and jobs) and strong incentives (progress charts) are offset by the freedom in the choice of subjects for a given day. It is in this combination of definiteness and freedom that the strength of the Dalton Plan lies. Under a properly conducted scientific management system, each worker becomes his own efficiency engineer; he studies every factor that influences his production; and he acquires new habits and drops wasteful ones so as to in-

crease his efficiency. Under the Dalton Plan, where freedom and definiteness are combined, each student is bound to study his methods and analyze his progress into factors that hinder or further it. He is led to study his own needs and possibilities, and to acquire the habits of work that are adapted to himself as well as to his subjects. May we not expect that he will find out much that will supplement the results of experimental education?"

DALTON IN A SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND*

By

J. M. Ritchie, M. A.

In a recent summary of modern educational movements, Sir John Adams showed that there was a distinct trend away from the classroom as formerly understood. The old idea of the massed pupils sitting in rows while the teacher exerted himself to evoke a collective response was, he contended, passing out of fashion. The difficulties of class teaching have always been recognized, but have been regarded as inevitable. The teacher had to adapt his expositions and his questioning to the average child and now-a-days the average child is held to be, like the man in the street, a creature of fiction. No matter how well-graded the classes may be, there can be no two pupils exactly alike in attainments or in pace of working. Compromise must be the order of the day. However the pace be set it is sure to prove awkward to some. If it be slowed down to suit the backward pupils, time is wasted and boredom caused. If the pace be quickened, the laggards are left behind and gain nothing from the subsequent instructions. It was consideration of this elementary factor in classroom routine that led to the elaboration of the Dalton Plan.

It must be frankly admitted that in abandoning the old style of class teaching, some admirable factors in education are jeopardized. In a well managed class there is a mental *esprit de corps* which is kept alive by corporate action. A wide awake teacher establishes an intellectual give-and-take between himself and his class and also among the members of his class which cannot be sacrificed without regret. Friendly competition and healthy emulation were developed by the old system (although some purists may dispute the validity of the adjectives). Mental agility and pride of place cannot be denied, as by-products.

In a lower plane, additional qualities may be urged. An orderly class looks well. It pleases the teacher's *amour propre*. It gives him the opportunity of exercising his art—that noble art in which are united the functions of the professor and the cross-examining counsel—that art which at its best was likened by Socrates to mental midwifery with all the added fascination that comes from the performing of a difficult operation before an admiring audience.

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*Written, February, 1926.

If the classroom system is surrendered, these things, some of more intrinsic worth than others, must be given up, too. Since the most skilled pilots in pedagogy say that the tide is setting away from collective teaching, we must face the situation and make only one stipulation, that whatever is put in its place shall have the balance of advantage on its side.

A moment's consideration may be given to a drawback inherent in the classroom system which is not overcome by the Dalton Plan. It is a failing demonstrated long ago by Froebel and brought more vividly to light by moderns like John Dewey. I refer to the artificiality. The essential function of the teacher, as conceived by them, is the task of providing the best environment for the expanding, developing nature of the child. Can this be done within the rather bare and depressing precincts of the typical public school? To the erection of these colossal factory-like structures other elements besides pure pedagogy have contributed. Modern city life with the inhabitants' natural antipathy to high taxes, standardized production in business, dependence on organization and the apotheosis of the machine, all these and many more phases of western civilization are reflected in the municipal school. The teacher, unless he has force and conviction enough to be a rebel, must accept the situation. It will help him greatly if he hugs close, as one of his deepest convictions, the belief that all these piles of bricks and mortar, these desks and apparatus, are unessential, may even be a hindrance rather than a help to his work of education. He will still continue to make use of them but with a salutary difference of outlook, a subtle change of emphasis which will bring freshness and reality to his work.

Now when once a teacher realizes the artificiality of the classroom system he is ever on the watch for a substitute which will be more closely in line with the educative process. None has yet been evolved which completely meets the case. Some of the suggestions most tempting on paper are beyond the power of the average practioner to carry out. They would be inspiring and admirable in the hands of their author but cannot be recommended for adoption by the rank and file. This cannot be said of the Dalton Plan. In fact, the ease with which it can be adopted constitutes in itself an adverse criticism. It is not a revolutionary scheme. It accepts the classroom, the hours of work, the "subjects", the set task, the programme of work, in short, all the machinery that radical reformers would like to sweep away. It is not a Utopia but rather a dodge for making the best of the present world. It is all a question of temperament whether this be held to constitute blame or commendation.

Little more than the briefest summary of the Plan is required here. It was worked out in the town of Dalton, Massachusetts, by Miss Helen Parkhurst in 1920 and has been described by her in various contributions to educational papers. Also Miss Evelyn Dewey's *The Dalton Laboratory Plan,* published in 1922, is an authoritative statement to which teachers desiring full information should turn.

The following sentences, by the Secretary of the Dalton Association, put the matter in a nut shell. "The Dalton Plan is a scheme of educational reorganization applicable to the school work of pupils from eight to eighteen years of age. It aims at giving the child freedom, making the school a community where the mutual interaction of groups is possible, and it approaches the whole problem of work from the pupil's point of view, giving him more responsibility for, and interest in, his own education.

"The form rooms becom subject laboratories, wherein are collected all the books and apparatus relative to the particular subjects. The pupils are still grouped in forms for convenience' sake."

To adapt a plan of this kind to a school for the blind is at once more easy and more difficult than to do so for an ordinary school. It is more easy because in any progressive school for the blind there is already a large amount of individual teaching and independent study. The classes are small and the teacher is on the spot to act as guide, rather than as lecturer or drill sergeant. Thus the spirit of Dalton is already there and it is a development rather than a reversal of policy to bring in the full-fledged system.

The greatest obstacle to successful working lies in the lack of facility possessed by backward pupils in the medium through which the self-tuition must take place. In other words, the pupil must be a fairly fluent reader and writer. Many blind children, especially among those who have come late to school are not. The danger is obvious. Time which should be spent on history or literature is being swallowed up, to an excessive extent, in grappling with the mechanical problems of interpretation. The efficient teacher shrinks from seeing time spent in this way and is all impatience to act as medium, and substitute for the cumbrous machinery of braille transcription and composition, the crisp and animated notes of a *viva voce* exchange. Great care is required to mark the line which divides legitimate correction of this sort from that which comes from unconscious professional egotism, from the teacher's reluctance to leave the centre of the picture. Teachers have to be ever on their guard against teaching too much and the Dalton Plan is a valuable restraint in this direction. It is better that a child should do a thing for himself even if he does it laboriously with an extravagant outlay of time and with groanings that may not be uttered than that the teacher should do it for him though with neatness and dispatch.

While realizing this to the full, however, there is no doubt that a fairly good standard of braille proficiency must be postulated before the adoption of the Dalton Plan can be justified in a school for the blind. Before leaving the question of braille it may be suggested that it is well to have a transition class outside the Dalton scheme for pupils who are backward, whether their condition be due to neglect, natural slowness or lateness in coming to school. The transition class has a limited curriculum and lays particular stress on braille. The pupil is quick to grasp the idea that braille is not an end in itself but a key to unlock the door of knowledge and is soon eager to get on to the Dalton. There, to vary the metaphor, he will use the tools which he has forged in the transition class and start with zest on the business of equipping himself for life. By this method, braille is mastered more quickly by such pupils than can be done in the old-fashioned way.

One difficulty experienced in a school for the blind is that the equipment in the direction of reference books, etc., is often severely limited. This is a handicap, but not a preventive and considerable ingenuity is called forth in making the most and the best of whatever is available.

As has already been stated it is a merit of the Plan that each pupil is enabled to work at his own pace and it is interesting to note in this connection that the quickest set of pupils get through in the year just about double what is compassed by the slow ones. This advantage is peculiarly beneficial to a school for the blind. Such a school is nearly always small in numbers and on the old system a smart pupil might reach the top class at the age of 12 or 13. This created a troublesome situation and some marking time on the part of these youngsters was inevitable. On the Dalton Plan the pupil never reaches the end, for assignments can be planned to suit any appetite however voracious. The alert pupil likes the Dalton Plan. The slow pupil feels lost at first. He is thrown on his own resources too much for his liking. The fact that he is a slow eater makes him all the more anxious to continue to be spoon-fed. He dislikes the responsibility of the added freedom. He feels that life is too difficult, too complicated on the new basis. He longs for the deep ruts that keep his wheels from straying. All this is, of course, a compliment to the Plan. The more initiative and self-reliance we can work into the characters of blind boys and girls, the better hope there will be for their future success. It is more important that a child should know how to obtain knowledge and get into the way of finding it when he needs it, than that he should be the passive absorber of information he himself does not see.

The most important criterion for determining whether or not the Dalton Plan is being successfully used in any school lies in the assignments. These are the programmes of work drawn up in all Daltonized subjects. They may be conceived in a genuinuely educational spirit. They may, on the other hand, be little better than the test cards which were in vogue a generation ago. Much time and thought, therefore, must be given to their elaboration. The assignments in each subject may be roughed out by the teacher responsible, but this is done in accordance with a general organic Scheme of Work and the staff must be allowed to consider them together in regularly recurring staff meetings. These discussions are most helpful. They give the necessary opportunity for breaking down water-tight compartments and for making sure that the various tasks form component and well proportioned parts of the unified whole. They are useful in impressing on the minds of all members a due sense of perspective in regard to the work of each and a corporate feeling of responsibility for the general education that is being attempted by the School.

The Plan was adopted at Swiss Cottage three years ago and experience gives a verdict in favor of its retention. The staff are prepared to abandon it for any other method whose advantages are superior, but it is unlikely that there will be any return to the old form of class teaching.

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